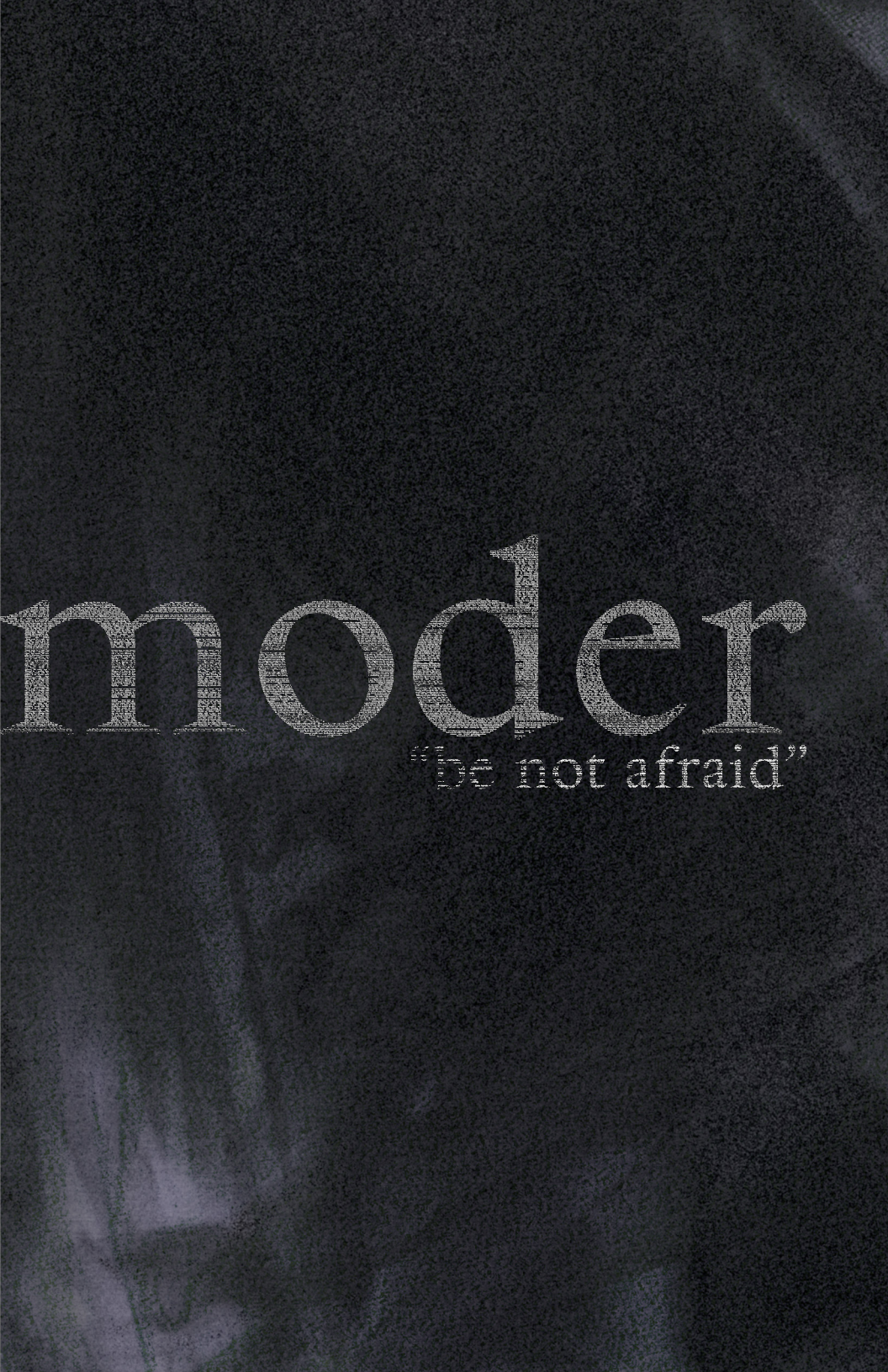
boymoder

swanskin

boy


nder
"be not afraid"

An album deeply inspired by the Southern gothic, *boymoder* explores gender fatalism and the self-destructive beliefs which poison the mind and propel us towards detransition.

i. Cassie Serafina is haunted by the voice of god. A young [redacted] from southern Arkansas, Cassie believes herself to be the victim of a strange transmutative curse, her body slowly metamorphosing into that of a monstrous eldritch angel.

ii. As a heat wave strikes her rural home, Cassie's hallucinations worsen. Oppressive walls of digital distortion represent the crushing discomfort of masculinity; soaring synth lines hint at the potential beauty of something more. Uncertain and confused, Cassie's true desires remain unclear.

iii. Gaining new awareness of her seraphic form, our protagonist is paralyzed with fear and doubt. Shifting electronic textures and plaintive vocal melodies portray an ephemeral yearning for something just out of reach. Cassie desires change but is unable to enact it, praying nightly for divine intervention but refusing to intervene herself.

iv. It all becomes too much: the delusions, the discomfort, and the looming danger of excommunication. Cassie steals a car and flees west, hoping to find some cure that might exorcise this evil from her flesh. Enter Zophie, another girl afflicted with the same strange disease. The two find sisterhood in their shared monstrosity and quickly fall into a codependent relationship. As the heat of summer gives way to a gentle autumn air, Cassie comes to view herself as a mother, a sister, and a lover to Zophie, guiding her through the early stages of transition.

v. Meanwhile, Cassie's faith in her own transition begins to buckle under the weight of intense self-loathing. Heavy guitars convey an overwhelming sense of exhaustion, a feeling only briefly abated by Zophie's dulcet confessions of love. Singing in duet, Zophie attempts to break down the walls of her guarded lover, but ultimately Cassie drifts further and further away, disappearing down the infinite American highways.

vi. As Zophie's beauty surpasses her own, Cassie's dreams of milk and honey are met with polluted air and sickening sunlight. Rendered in stark relief, Cassie's outlook grows increasingly fatalistic as she begins to imagine a black-and-white divide between herself and her transangelic sister. Although she technically shares Cassie's curse, Zophie's porcelain skin and snowy white wings come to represent unattainable beauty in the eyes of our protagonist. Cassie begins to believe that there must be something inherently wrong with her, something predetermined which separates her from the femininity she so desperately covets.

Bedding down in a tiny Los Angeles apartment, our protagonists opt to conceal their transangelic identities in the name of survival. Zophie goes stealth. Cassie boymodes.

vii. While these approaches seem antithetical to eachother at first glance, Cassie and Zophie both seek to evade potential predators by appearing less “trans.” Ultimately, this survival strategy creates a dissonance between their external realities and their internal sense of self. Hiding their true forms, they become isolated from their communities, from their identities, and even from one another.

viii. In the gaze of overly-sympathetic Californians, Cassie feels small and two-dimensional: her experiences reduced to a pretty song and a puppet show. Sparse, restrained verses are interrupted via emotional outpourings and swelling instrumentation. Cassie contorts herself to be small, keeping her emotions in check only for them to come rushing to the surface time and time again.

ix. Rebuffed, neglected, and ignored, Zophie has become nothing more than a foil for Cassie's incessant self-hatred. Although she recoils from her lover's jealous gaze, Zophie ultimately remains unable to escape the intoxicating dance of codependency.

x. Cassie's obsession with her own physiology reaches new heights as she desperately searches for a way to exorcize the evil of masculinity from her flesh. Racked with debilitating body dysmorphia, Cassie fixates on her (imagined) deformities until she can no longer recognize herself.

xii. Interpreting her lover’s flourishing beauty as a personal slight, Cassie snaps. Unable to bear the reminder of her own inadequacy, she murders Zophie in a jealous rage. Like the mythological figure of Saturn Cassie devours her surrogate child out of fear of being surpassed. Quoting Salome and sampling Nevada before imploding into a jumble of harsh noise and electronics, Cassie becomes the monster she always believed herself to be.

xiii. Returning to the South a prodigal son, Cassiel finds himself lost and alone in the overcast Arkansan winter. Swirling guitars drift about the listener like a flurry of snow in the night. As Cassiel struggles to acclimate to the cold, clouds of dark distortion coalesce on the horizon until the soundscape is completely overtaken by a heavy winter storm.

xiv. Distant and disconnected, Cassiel reflects on the circumstances which pushed him to detransition. Lush strings and a dusty celesta depict an eerie, unstable detachment. Unable to undo that which has been done, Cassiel resigns himself to a life of isolation and bitter Arkansan winters.

BOYMODER
GLOSSARY OF RECURRING SYMBOLS

THE CURSE.....The divine represents self-actualization and transition. Although deep down Cassie holds dreams of elysium, she ultimately views her halo as a curse, a disease, and a punishment. In her reflection, she sees only a seraphim monster, an eldritch horror beyond the comprehension of men. Antithetically, she views her trans sisters as cherubim, beautiful angels with porcelain skin and snowy white wings.

THE MONOCHROME.....Throughout the record, high-contrast light and dark imagery represents our protagonist's fatalistic attitude toward her own gender. Assuming there must be something inherently wrong with her, Cassie imagines a black-and-white divide between herself and the women she envies. To Cassie, daylight represents unattainable femininity, a cruel reminder of her own inadequacy. Likewise, the pitch darkness of the night represents her inescapable disfigurement.

THE SEASONS.....Depictions of volatile weather and shifting seasons reflect Cassie's fluctuating mental state throughout the record. In the first act, the heat of summer represents the discomfort of masculinity and the alienation of the South. Muggy, humid, and miserable, Cassie exists in a state of dazed stupefaction. However, as the leaves begin to turn a gentle shade of orange, for the first time Cassie is instilled with hope at the potential of an ever-changing autumn. Finally, as the air grows colder, Cassie once again begins to feel hopeless about her transition. She falls into a depressive state of self-imposed isolation. Ever so slowly, the winter consumes her.

THE PLANET.....Named after the Archangel Cassiel, our protagonist is repeatedly compared to the celestial, horoscopic, and mythological figure of Saturn. Eclipsing her lover's radiance, Cassie's relationship to Zophie is likened to that of a planet and a moon: two bodies locked in orbit, unable to escape one another's gravity. As Cassie's maternal role in Zophie's life is polluted with resentment and envy, allusions are made to the mythological Saturn, who consumes his own children out of fear of being surpassed. Finally, as she detransitions and returns to her old life in the South, the astrological concept of a saturn return ironically highlights Cassie's refusal to change.

THE VINES.....Cassie and Zophie's codependency is often represented by Kudzu, an invasive species that consuming everything around it. Ultimately, these tangled vines of love are unsustainable, destructive, and suffocating.

THE APOSTATE.....Cassie's wavering relationship with her trans identity is personified by the Apostate. The choice to detransition is likened to that of a clergywoman losing her faith. Meanwhile, Zophie's love and devotion to Cassie is depicted with similar language as Zophie's trust in her lover begins to falter.

THE LAMB.....Cassie's innocence is symbolized by the lamb, an image often conjured when portraying Cassie as a sympathetic figure. Although she inflicts physical and emotional harm upon those around her, these behaviors come from her inability to cope. No matter how monstrous she believes herself to be, she will always remain a helpless child in pain, a "sacred lamb convinced her wool is matted fur."

act i

i. august forever

sweat pools in a coffee cup
the heat seeps its way indoors
outside her clothes stick to her skin, like a
clinging lover she cant stand anymore

she wakes with a start most nights
dry mouth, His voice still in her ears
haunted by a guiding light
whispers of a place far from here

there must be something wrong with her
lurking just beneath the skin
self-inflicted prophecy, she's
picking at her wounds again

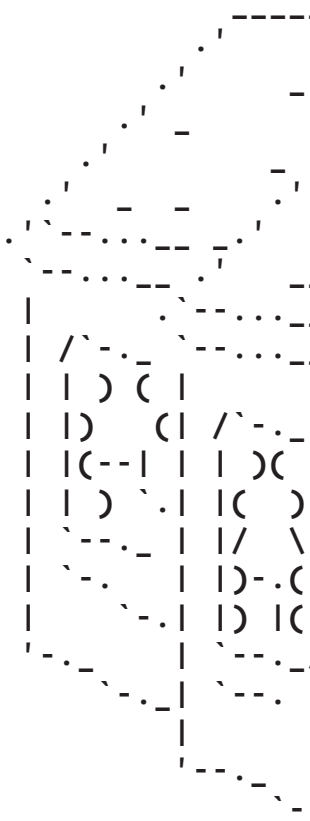
foul vines stretch out their arms for miles
covering the highways outside town
swallowing the summer rains
cyclical misunderstandings

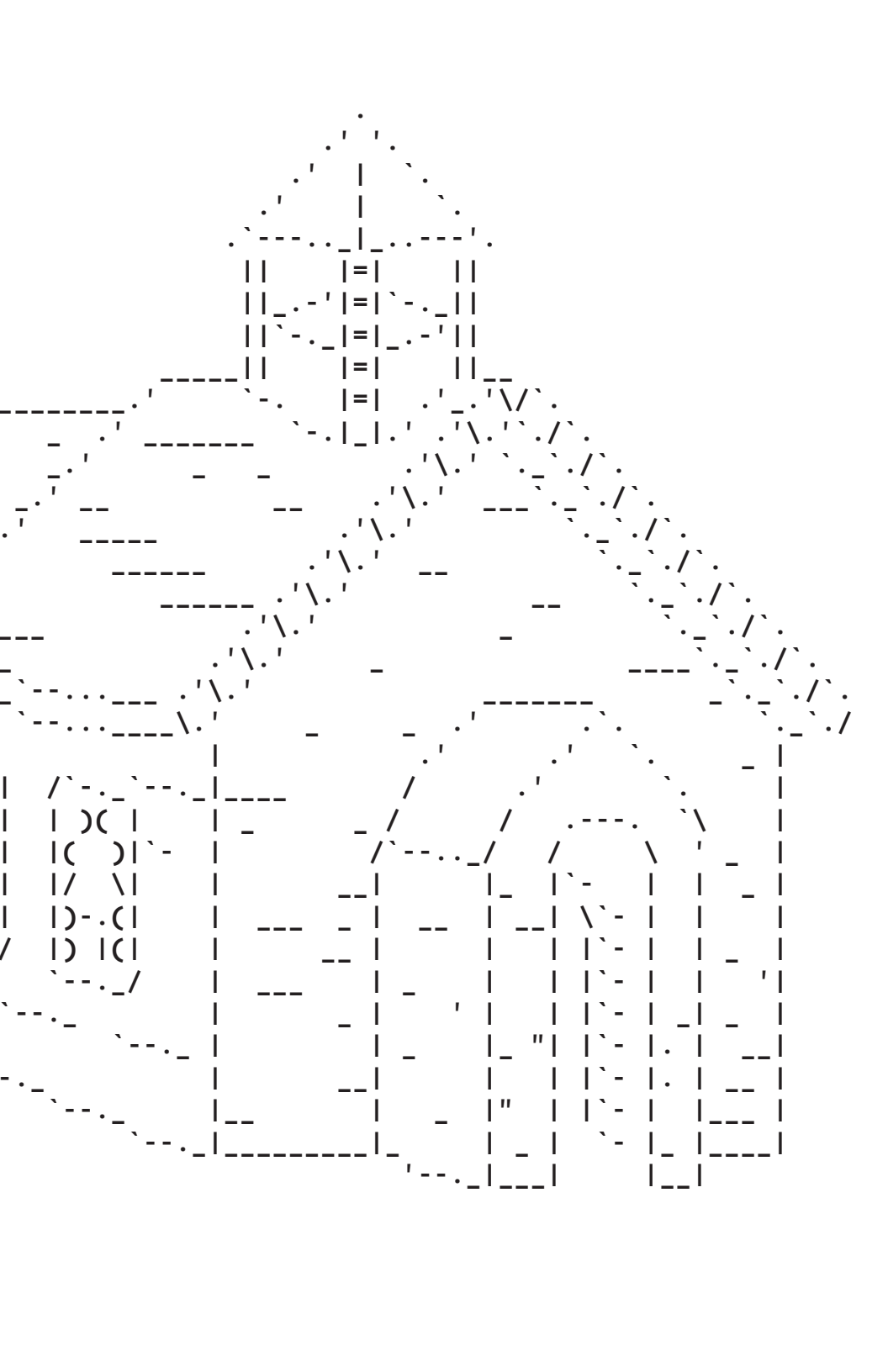
sip slow from a wishing well
tiptoe when you walk through hell
if i could hear you why would you be asking?

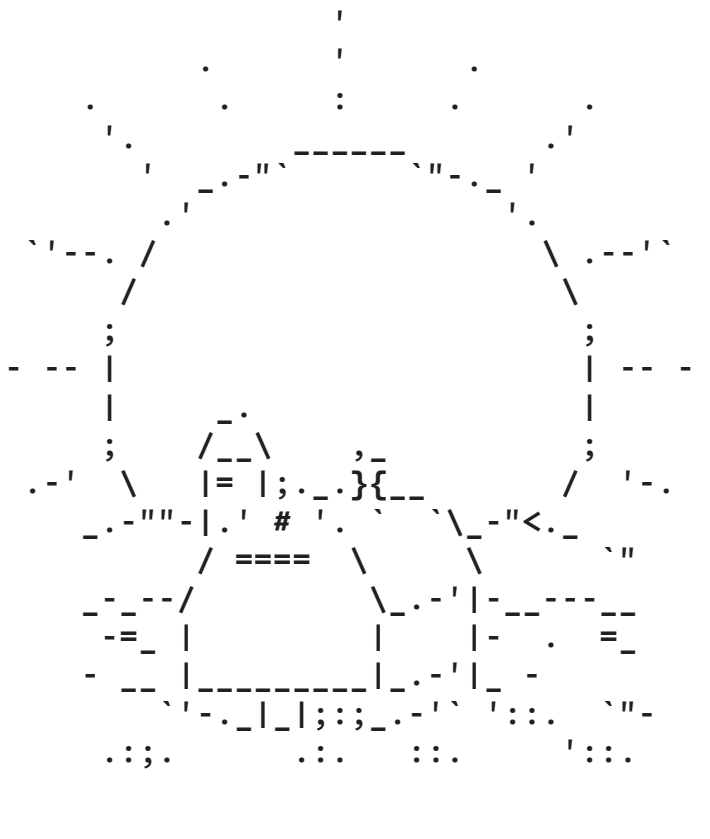
get low when the drums come in
go home, peel off your skin
if i could hear you why would you be asking?

i just wanna feel like myself when i wear a t-shirt
wanna feel like myself without putting on a skirt
only like how i look when i'm drunk and I'm crying
mascara running down, mycelium from my eyes

i can't wait to feel like myself
i can't wait to feel like me







ii. heat stroke

deacclimation, a heavy cloud of enervation
heat stroke hallucinations overtaking me
halo of sweat, i am beset with His divine halation
september storms sweep through
the dying dogwood trees

i don't know if it's real
i can't tell you how i fucking feel
if it's wrong i'm so fucking lost
no big deal

euphoric dreaming of the
angel that i might become
light and beauty cradled
gently underwing

exist in hope and prayer
that i might bear the
weight of freedom
wait for a sign from somewhere
just beyond my reach

iii. sheep, dog

lethargic livestock in a field swallowed by swarms of summer flies
as the seasons change she will remain, just waiting there to die

rabid sheep dogs circle ‘round hot wire fence keeps her inside
resigned to naught, her silence fraught, she’s sick of waiting for a sign

summer malaise, stuck in the deep south
one of these days i’m gonna get out

atticus will pray for me, he hopes i can be saved
i think we’ve known eachother since like 2008

southerly extends her hand, but i don’t want her help
how could she ever get me when i don’t get myself?

out of the cave, fleeing the compound
riddled with bullets, i’m lying face down

a man is burning brush on the other side of town
i hope the fire spreads and burns the farmland to the ground

i pray to god you shut up and talk about it
you bite the hand that would dare to feed you solace
no i don't get it but i could try, i promise
come on, be honest

remember when we
we were just learning our psalms
hands tied together with yarn
oh did i do something wrong?

or maybe it's just summer malaise

iv. last rainstorm of summer

you were quiet when i met you, hair was tucked behind your ear
halo hid under your beanie, wings had only just appeared
you were running when I met you, thought I was the only one
spent the summer in a rainstorm, spending autumn in the sun

we broke down in Colorado, ran your fingers through my hair
sat for hours by the highway in the bitter Denver air
i lose focus, barely notice, look to you to feel secure
take my eyes off of the road and put the pedal to the floor

i want you more, i want you more
i can't ignore that I want you more
hot summer storms, soft petrichor
i can't ignore that I want you more

flora fractures the pavement
gentle fauna lying dead in the road
lovesick deification
i want your beauty for my own

i need your flesh, i need your bones
repent out west i will atone
the kudzu blooms, our love will grow
it will consume, He told me so

give them water, give them sunlight but the plants die anyway
on your windowsill the leaves fall off, perform a pirouette

v. vanishing point

what if it was all a fantasy?
born from a fleeting euphoric daydream
how can i keep pushing myself on?
when the trauma's too heavy to set to song?

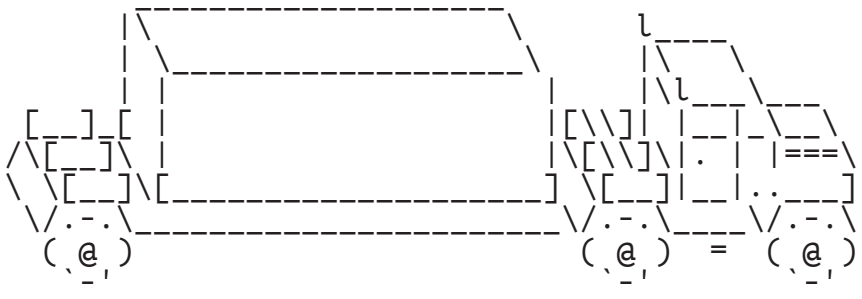
you never liked it back in arkansas
driving cross country in a beat up stolen car
yeah you're free now but i know that it's hard
when the people who love you don't know who you are

i want to know you
i want to love you Cassie
will you love me too?

i'm so afraid of the hurt (torn up jeans, baggy shirt)
waiting for the next humiliation
always expecting the worst (convinced this gift is a curse)
but not for lack of a good fucking reason

i see you punish yourself (running from you)
i feel your absence in everything we do
i wish I knew how to help (dying kudzu)
watching you vanish somewhere just beyond my view

i feel like a planet, scared i'll devour you whole
my only hope is the city. pollution, purify my soul



vi. photochemical

gentle light drifts through my fingers
still I linger upon that which I lack

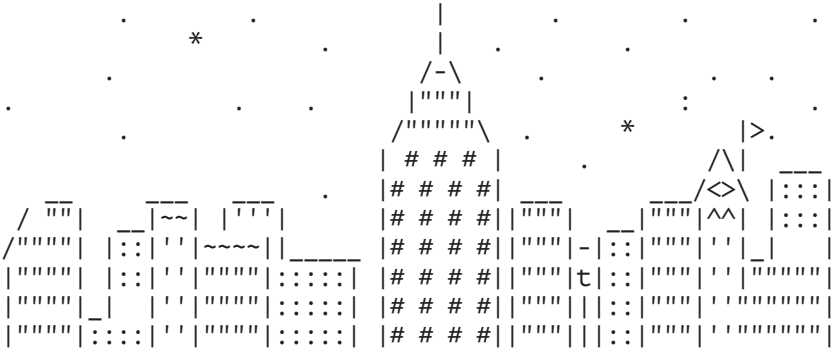
heavy smog, cutting contrast
caustic stop bath, the emulsion fades to black

her brilliance blacks me out
casting shadows in the crowd
overexposed, the midtones burn away
it's inescapable, the photochemical
that crushing glow that burns below the haze

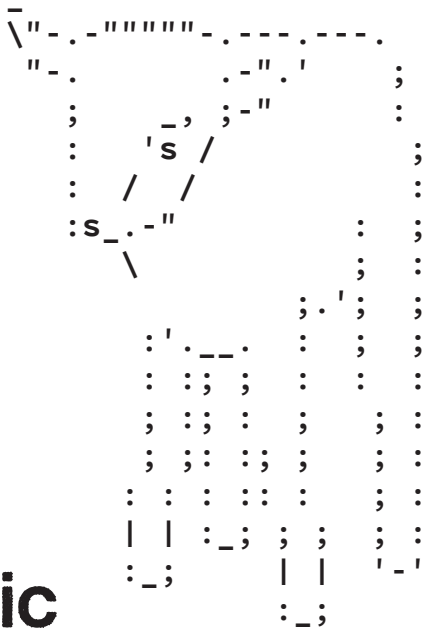
chemistry predetermined
bitter black tongue, the dark swallows the light

her brilliance makes me uglier
washed out city, shilloetted against her light

if it's not these wretched wings what could've made me so?
reflections of pretty things pure as polluted snow
angels entwined by fate, mirrored pathology
so what's wrong with me?



act ii



vii. apostatic selection

polymorphic, apostatic, preyed upon beyond belief
my body buried in the fabric, camouflaged phylogeny
sick of getting called a faggot with my friends out on the street
i need relief, i need to breath

orphaned elephants in musth
fleeing poachers, forced to evolve without their tusks
twelve thousand pounds of fear and rage
in a tiny apartment on the east side of LA

taking comfort in a curse
sacred lamb convinced her wool is matted fur
angel's flock, she's gone astray
worn out and sheepish, she forsakes her pious ways

viii. shadow puppet

you swear that you're in love with me
but my silhouette is all that you can see
after i've sung my song, that you found so pretty
still can't own up to falling for a tranny

i can't stand the way you tried to touch me
but even worse was what
i knew you saw when you thought of me
still i struggle to survive
i can't say the same for you

your distasteful puppet show of sympathy
throws shadows on millennial gray walls
you're pulling at my strings
and waiting for applause
suspended in your childish gaze
i am just a paper doll

spent so long running away
from the ones who love me
i fell into your crooked grasp
i just wanted someone
to meet me where I am today
i guess I know the world's answer to that

reeling from the flash
of a double barrel shotgun
afterimage burned into my brain
I want to see the sky
feel the breeze across my skin
but i'm frozen in a single static frame

i step outside to clear my head
running through every single thing I wish i'd said
i think my fears were always right
maybe i'm not cut out to live inside the spotlight

i can't stand the way you looked me up and down
another bullet in the list of reasons why I'll leave this town

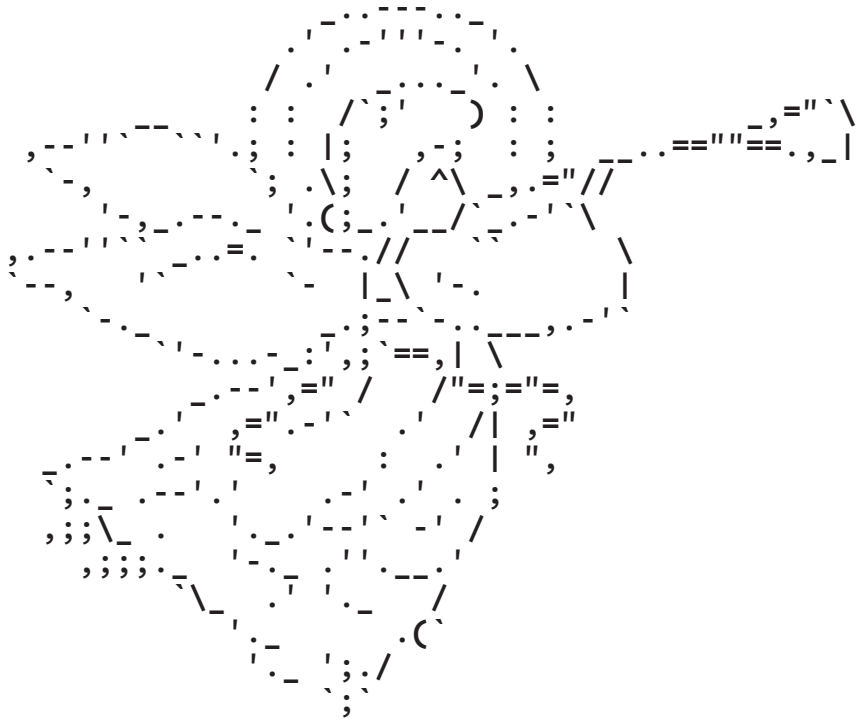
ix. transangelicism

apostatic daze, shadows of my doubt
feathers cast in gray, you say i black you out

i long to worship at your feet
but you turned your angel eyes on me
fixed in your gaze, my perfect halo on display
terrified of what you'll say

sleepless and opaque, you think you own the night
still i hold your weight, it makes my body light

do i share the blame for this?
the stars are watching as we kiss
intertwined in the abyss
i am eclipsed



x. ribbons

go on girl give me nothing
falling ill time and time again
suffocate from the rooftop
fall off, pretend

cacophonous whispers
ugly words, prettier than me
my saccharine sisters
give me nothing

be not afraid
a trillion faces
fluid shape
unknowable

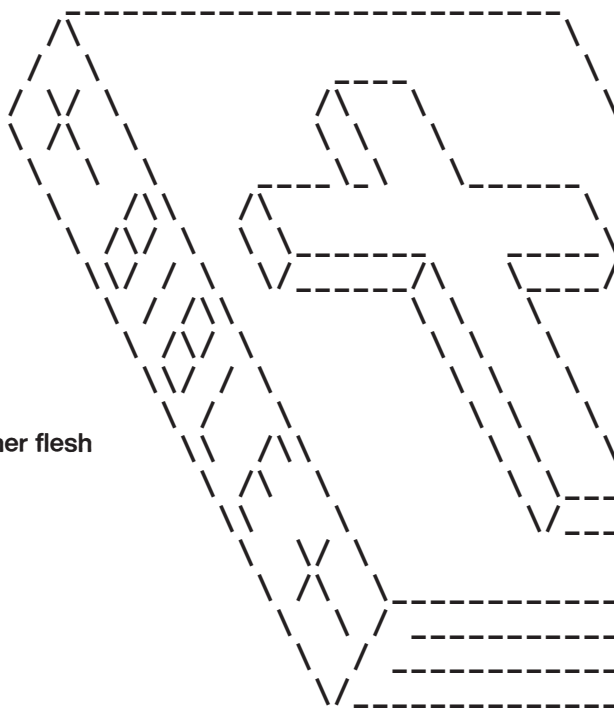
be not afraid
their thoughts consume me
salvation waits
be not afraid

epidermal incision
something lurks underneath her flesh
sew the cut up with ribbon
lab work, blood test

impossible schema
facial features begin to glitch
geometry fractured
something eldritch

seeing double in a sextape
she's doing everything that makes me wrong
tread quietly in our space
c'mon girl just play along

tie the ribbons on your old dress
into shapes we can understand
my avatar moderated
craft a personhood to our demands



xi. saturn devouring her son

something
polluting my heart with jealousy
angel of love, why can't you see?
why did you have to change?
you've left me all alone

zophie
fall into beauty's rot
the kudzu burns
i just sit there and watch
smoke on the breeze
i loved you when you were a freak
dazzled by the sight of me

here so soon, self imposed apocalypse
hide the moon hide the stars before we kiss
taste so sweet drinking from the blood of lamb
if i can't be you then nobody can

blood coagulates
fetal figure infirm
gentle incubate
cursed to a premature birth
wait for the phlegm and flesh coalesce
all gross and featherless and frail

dark dream
feel my nails in your skin
muffled screams
i hear music again
i won't be your angel or your man
if i can't be you then nobody can

the monster is gross and the plot goes like this
for fifteen minutes you're introduced to the characters and you think
i fucking hate these yuppies, i wish a monster would kill them
then for an hour and fifteen minutes the monster takes it time killing them

xii. snow angels

when i said it was dark out, i wasn't lying
head full of storm clouds, i can't stop crying
i wish that i knew how to find the silver lining in this

now i'm passing by places i knew in a past life
full hemostasis i'm frozen in headlights
cds in the glovebox but they always seem to skip

loblolly needles stitch simple and homespun
ragged and feeble, a prodigal failson
foot to the treadle, bear witness as the spool of fate spins

a quilt made alone, made with lace, made with languor
carefully sewn in her home safe from danger
soft as the snow but the comfort is cold as the wind

my things won't fit on the desk
my clothes just stick out of the drawers
my body sits in a bedroom that isn't mine anymore

now i think i'm forgetting what summer felt like
seraph snow angels in dying daylight
i wish that i knew how to find my way back home
but i'm lost in the snow

xiii. new year's resolution

slumber on a bed of Kudzu leaves
waiting for her wings to set her free
vines ensnare her wrists and bind her feet
tangled in a euphoric daydream

as saturn doth return, he's born anew
walking once again in his old room
floral paper peeling at the seams
static snow and spectral frequencies

angel, falling with the summer rain
beautiful hidden face

blood and feathers blanketing his sheets
scapulary sores replace his wings
safe inside to stitch and suture wounds
endless sterile winter afternoon

texaco beneath the overpass
backwards messages through foggy glass
close the freezer door from the inside
better not to live than live and die

credits

i. august forever

Written by Cleo Connie McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Estelle Allen
Additional Vocals by Estelle Allen
Backing Vocals by Teather
Lead Guitar by Roy McKenzie
Aux Percussion by Renfred Harper
Sample from *Nevada* by Imogen Binnie
Produced by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Patrick Hills
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

ii. heat stroke

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Bass by Renfred Harper
Sample from Ghost World
Produced by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

iii. sheep, dog

Written by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, and Astra King
Additional Vocals by Astra King
Backing Vocals by Teather
Aux Percussion by Renfred Harper
Sample from Bravest Warriors
Produced by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

iv. last rainstorm of summer

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Backing Vocals by Teather
Produced by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

v. vanishing point

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Additional Vocals by Jaishri Vidyarthi
Aux Percussion by Renfred Harper
Produced by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

vi. photochemical

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Bass by Renfred Harper
Aux Percussion by Renfred Harper
Produced by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Patrick Hills
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

vii. apostatic selection

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Bass and Aux Percussion by Renfred Harper
Produced by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Patrick Hills
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

viii. shadow puppets

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Produced by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael

ix. transangelicism

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Backing Vocals by Jaishri Vidyarthi
Produced by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael

x. ribbons

Written by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Catherine Egbert
Additional Vocals by Catherine Egbert
Produced by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

xi. saturn devouring her son

Written by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Vocals by Teather
Sample from Nevada by Imogen Binnie
Produced by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie & Juno Raphael

xii. snow angels

Written by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Produced by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Bass and Aux Percussion by Renfred Harper
Additional Guitars, Synths, and Drums by Renfred Harper
Engineered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper

xiiii. new year's resolution (cassiel's song)

Written by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Produced by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper
Mixed and Mastered by Cleo McKenzie, Juno Raphael, & Renfred Harper.

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“Be not afraid”